

PRAYER—ITS DISCOURAGEMENTS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

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A SERMON
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“But he answered her not a word.”
Matthew 15:23

WITH Christian men it is not a matter of question as to whether God hears prayer or not. There is no fact in mathematics which has been more fully demonstrated than this fact in experience—that God hears prayer. About some other things in Christianity, young believers may have a question, but about the Lord's answering prayer, even they cannot entertain a doubt, while to the old and advanced believer who has tested the power of the mercy seat, and proved it thousands of times, it is a matter about which he never allows a question, for he knows that as surely as that he himself exists, and that God lives in heaven, the prayers of puny but believing man have power to move the almighty arm of God.

Probably, in the course of the past week, some of us have met with as many as a dozen special answers to prayer. Skeptics spend their sneers in vain upon us. Facts are blessed, as well as stubborn, things.

Men may say that it is not possible that the cries and petitions of man can move the heart of God. They may question it, they may raise doubts about it, but doubts upon this matter never enter our minds, they never touch our inner consciousness, for we know that answers to prayer are a fact, and until we can doubt that we are men, until we can doubt that we breathe the air or live on food, until we can doubt that which we see with our eyes and touch with our hands, we cannot doubt that God is, “and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Of course, our confidence that God answers prayer is not an argument to another man. He who has not tried it cannot have proved it for himself. But to those who have tried prayer, and proved it, we insist upon it that it amounts to a demonstration as clear as logic itself can make it, when, having called upon God, not merely once or twice, but thousands of times throughout their lives, they have invariably met with the same result, namely, a gracious answer from Him who really does and will hear prayer. Yet there is, sometimes, a strange thing which puzzles the earnest believer. There are times when it does seem as if his prayers were not heard, for certainly it is not answered, or at least, not answered as he expected. There are seasons, even with God's true children—

*“When at His feet they groan,
Yet take their wants away.”*

They present their petition before the Lord, yet their request does not seem to be complied with there and then. To those who know that this is no strange thing which has happened to them, it is not a matter which staggers their faith, for they can say, with Ralph Erskine, that—

*“They're heard when answered soon or late;
Yea, heard when they no answer get;
Are kindly answered when refused,
And treated well when harshly used.”*

They understand that God's delays are not denials, and that His denials to particular requests are only intended to let us know that He will give us something richer and better than we have asked. If He does not pay your prayers in silver, He will pay them in gold, and if your prayers be long in coming back, they shall be like a richly-laden ship which is all the longer on its way because of its costly freight, and which shall amply repay for the time spent on the voyage by the richness of the cargo it brings from the far country.

Yet I must again remind you that to some, and especially to young seekers, it is a staggering experience when, having long cried to Jesus, He answers them not a word, when, having prayed to Him, they have seen no smile upon His benignant face, and have heard no word of comfort from those lips of His which drop like honeycombs to others, but seem to be as dry wells to them.

I am going to discuss this matter now as God the Holy Ghost may enable me, and I pray that He may make it comforting to many a distracted spirit. May some be graciously brought up out of the deep darkness of their prison house, and be caused to rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free!

I shall speak of the text, first, in reference to *those who have been praying for themselves*, and secondly, in regard to *those who have been praying for others*.

I. First then, I am going to describe the case of SOME WHO HAVE BEEN PRAYING FOR THEMSELVES, but to whom, as yet, Christ has answered not a word.

I can describe the case of these people experientially, for I have felt the same. As some of you know, I passed through five years of agony during which my young spirit was crushed almost to despair. During those five years, if ever a child prayed to God, I did, and if ever a lad groaned out of a longing spirit to JEHOVAH in heaven, I did.

You may remember that part of John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding" where he speaks of the exercises of his soul, and especially of his terror because his prayers seemed to reverberate from a brazen heaven, and not to pierce the skies. Such too, was my experience. I am sure that I was sincere in my prayers, and in my groanings that could not be uttered, but yet, answers to my supplications there were none. I can speak, therefore, I trust, with all the more power because I can speak sympathetically of something which I have known and felt.

Poor soul, you have been praying for these last few months, and your complaint is that you have not had one gracious answer to your petitions, or one precious promise applied with power to your soul. Let me remind you that the poor woman, of whom our text speaks, was in a similar condition. Indeed, not only did she not receive a promise, but she received a rebuff from Christ. Instead of a gracious invitation to come unto Him, she had almost a command to go from Him. When He did speak to her, He said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Yours, then, is not a singular case. You must not sit down in despair because no promise has come home to your soul. Still continue to cry unto the Lord, still be constantly in prayer to Him. He will, He must, hear you by and by, and you shall have your heart's desire.

"Yes," you say, "but not only have I not had a promise, but I have not had any comforting sign whatever. The more I pray, the worse I feel, and the more I groan, the more it seems that I may groan. If my prayers are arrows, they are arrows that fall downwards, and return into my own heart instead of flying up to God's ear. I must pray, I cannot help it, my soul would burst if it did not express itself in words, yet my prayer does me little or no good. I rise from my knees more distressed than ever, and I come out of my closet, not as a man released from prison, but as he that passes from one dungeon to another. The Lord has refused to listen to my supplication, He has forgotten to be gracious, in anger He has shut up the bowels of His compassion."

Perhaps you even go further than this and say, "I feel as if my prayer never would be answered. Something within me tells me that I may pray, but that after all, I shall perish, that there may be mercy for all others in the world, but not for me. I may lift the knocker of mercy's gate, but the sound shall be only like that of a hammer upon my coffin, there shall be no music of hope as I rap at the golden gate. I

know that God hears prayer, but not the prayer of the wicked, that is an abomination unto the Lord. Such, I fear, is my prayer, and therefore, He will not hear me.”

Ah, poor soul! let me remind you that there is nothing that is so deluding as feelings. Christians cannot live by feelings, nor can you. Let me further tell you that these feelings are the work of Satan, they are not right feelings. What right have you to set up your feelings against the Word of Christ? He has expressly said, “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

It is not a question whether a man who truly prays shall be saved. He is saved, though he may not know it, he has the germs of salvation in his prayer. “Behold, he prayeth,” means, “Behold, he liveth, behold, he is accepted, behold, heaven openeth its gates for him.” He prays, JEHOVAH hears, mercy answers, the man is blessed. I pray you then, let not your feelings fly in the teeth of God’s promises, but hope on, for though your case be very sad, it is not a strange one, and there is hope for you.

Having thus described your case, let me now warn you of a danger. There is a danger to which all those are exposed who have prayed for any length of time without consciously receiving an answer from God, and that is either to get despairing thoughts of themselves or else hard thoughts of Christ.

That poor Canaanite was a brave woman. She came of an accursed race, but certainly there was a special blessing resting upon her. If you or I had been there when Christ spoke to her so harshly, I wonder whether we would have taken His remarks so well as she did.

Do you remember times when Christ has been silent to you? If so, you can imagine what her feelings must have been when “He answered her not a word.” Some of you who have quick tempers, would have said, if that had been your experience, “Is this the Messiah of whom we have heard so much, and who is said to be so ready to relieve the distressed? Here have we been crying to Him in tones that seemed piercing enough to make a heart of adamant melt for us, yet He has not deigned to answer us. He seems to be stone deaf, or if He hears us, He does not condescend to give us any reply. Is this the kind and tender spirit of which we have heard so much?”

And when at last He spoke and said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs,”—some would have said, “If He would not grant us our request, He need not have used insulting epithets to us. Dogs, indeed! What means He by that term? He means that we do not belong to the favored race of Israel, and a fine thing it would be for us if we did. Are they not oppressed under the Roman yoke, and cast off like withered branches?”

The Canaanite woman might have said, “Why does He call me a dog? Am I not a woman, and an honest woman too, and one who does not deserve such a title as that? I wish I had never asked for mercy at His hands. To get such an insult as to have the name of ‘dog’ thrown at me is too bad, and I will not endure it!” That may be a strong way of putting the matter, but you and I have probably put it in just that way.

Have we not thought, because Christ has not answered our prayers, that there was a mistake about His graciousness—that He was not the Christ that some said He was—that He did not mean His invitation when He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” that He desired to tantalize poor souls, making them pray and cry to Him while He meant to be deaf to their requests?

Have you not had hard thoughts of Christ like those? If you have, I pray you to put them all away from you, and not to fall into this snare of Satan. Jesus is the good Christ still. Though He may seem to be stony-hearted, He is not so in reality, He is always tender, He has bowels of compassion. Slander Him not then, but be of good courage, and still cry unto Him.

Possibly, Satan says to you, “Your prayer is not of the right sort, and therefore, you never will be heard.” Yes, but that Canaanitish woman’s prayer to Christ was of the right sort, yet “He answered her not a word.” Notice what her prayer was, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David.” She gave Him the right name. She might have said, “Thou Son of Abraham.” That would have signified that He was the one in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. That was the covenant which the

Lord made with Abraham, but this woman said, “Thou Son of David.” The covenant made with David related not only to blessing and increase, but also to a kingdom, so this woman seemed to say to Christ, “Man of sorrows though Thou art, Thou art of royal blood, Thy visage is more marred than that of any man, and Thou wearest not a diadem, yet art Thou King.” She did, as it were, pay Him the homage which Pilate unwittingly paid Him when he placed over His head the inscription, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.” “Thou Son of David”—she knew how to address Him.

Then notice how she pleaded with Him, she appealed not to His justice, but to His mercy, to the love of His tender and compassionate heart, “Have mercy on me.” This was the plea of the publican, the prayer by which he was justified, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” There was nothing wrong in this woman’s prayer to Christ, yet “He answered her not a word.” So then, poor heart, your prayers also may be right and proper, and yet not be answered. If they are not answered, faint not, but continue to pray. The Lord will yet reply to your petition, He will open the windows of heaven, and shower down His mercy upon you, and you shall receive it with a gladsome heart.

Now, having reminded you of your danger, let me call to your recollection the grounds of your comfort. What had this woman to comfort her? Well, first, she had Jesus Christ’s face. He said to her, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.”

Now, my idea of the Savior is that He could not utter that harsh sentence without, somehow or other, letting the woman see, by the very expression of His countenance, that He was keeping something back, and that there was love yet in store for her. You know that your children can soon detect the meaning of what you say to them, for they can read your face as well as your words.

So can poor beggars, and so could this poor woman who was begging of Christ so hard for her child. “Ay,” she seemed to say, “Your lips may utter hard words, but Your loving eyes flash not the fire that should go with such severe sentences. I see a tear lifting up Your eyelids even now. I believe the language of Your face, that marred face—marred with sympathy for others’ sorrows, marred with the cares and burdens of others which have weighed You down—will not let me believe that Your heart is harsh.”

So, sinner, for your comfort, let me beseech you to look into the face of Jesus Christ. Do you believe that He—the Son of Mary, the Man of sorrows, grief’s acquaintance—can reject you? O Christ, when I picture You before my eyes, especially when I see Your face bedewed with bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and listen to Your agonized groanings in the garden, I cannot, and I will not, believe that You can ever reject a suppliant who cries to You, “Be merciful to me!”

Or if that shall not be enough to cheer you, remember that this poor woman had something more to comfort her, for she had heard the story of Christ’s good deeds. She had been told, even in Tyre, what He had done in Capernaum, and she had heard, though far away, what He had done in Chorazin, so she believed that He, who had done such good deeds to others, could not be hard to her.

So, sinner, let me tell you of the good deeds that Christ has done to others. I could bring you hundreds, or even thousands, who could truly say with the psalmist, “This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him.” Speak with your eyes, my brethren, and bear witness to the fact which I now testify—has not God heard your prayers, though you were sinners even as others, as vile by nature, and as hopeless by depravity? Did He not bring us up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set our feet upon a rock, and establish our goings? Sinner, He who did this for us will and must do the like for you if you plead for mercy through the precious blood of His dear Son.

But you have one comfort which this poor woman never had, she could not be told that Christ had died for her. Sinner, you who are seeking Christ, say not that He is harsh, and that He will not hear you. Come you with me, and by faith look upon Him on the cross. Can you behold His thorn crown, with its lancets piercing His blessed brow, and the tears streaming down His cheeks already crimsoned with His bloody sweat? Can you see His hands and feet as, pierced by the nails, they become founts of blood? There He hangs, naked, despised and rejected of men.

Yet He endured all this agony that He might save sinners, then how can you think so wickedly of Him as to suppose that He, who once died, the Just for the unjust, now that He lives again, has an adamant heart and no bowels of compassion? No, by His wounds, I beseech you to trust Him, by His bloody sweat, I implore you to continue your supplication unto Him, by His rent side, I urge you to wrestle with Him yet again, for He will hear you, His mercy shall come unto you, and you shall rejoice in it.

Lend me your ears while I give you a word of counsel as to what you ought to do. It is the Spirit of God who has taught you to pray. He has made you feel your need of a Savior, it is He who has compelled you to fall upon your knees, and to cry for mercy. Now remember that it is your duty, as well as your privilege, to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. What does that voice say to you? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

That is to say, even though your prayers be not answered in the teeth of every hard thought and every harsh word, trust Christ with your soul. If you do that, you are saved there and then. The way of salvation is not, “Pray, and be saved,” but “Believe, and be saved.” Christ said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Remember that your main business is not with answers to prayer, but with your answer to God’s call to you, and His call to you, poor conscience-stricken, awakened sinner, is, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.” Come, then, to Christ just as you are, and so you shall find that answer to your prayers which has been so long delayed. Still keep on wrestling with God until your prayers are answered.

Jericho’s walls did not fall down the first day the hosts of Israel went round them, but they compassed the city seven days, and on the seventh day, the walls fell flat to the ground. Elijah, on the top of Carmel, did not bring the rain the first time he prayed, but he said to his servant, “Go again seven times,” and there have been many other instances in which God has delayed the blessing, but has given it at the last.

I have thus preached, as God has enabled me, to poor seeking souls. O Spirit of God, apply the Word, and bring sinners to Christ, that they may find mercy in His wounds!

II. Now, for a few minutes, let us turn to the case of THOSE BELIEVERS, WHO HAVE LONG BEEN PRAYING FOR OTHERS WITHOUT APPARENT RESULT.

There is a father here, who has been pleading with God for his daughter, and though years of supplication have passed away, she is still unconverted, and as hardened as ever. There is a mother here, who has laid her children upon her bosom, in prayer, as once she did for nourishment when they were but babes, and yet, though she cries day and night for them, they are not saved.

My dear brothers and sisters, I beseech you never to give up praying for your children, or your other relatives, because although God may not answer you for a while, you shall certainly have the desire of your heart. Let me just give you one or two instances in which the power of prayer has been distinctly proved.

There was a young man who, because of his love for sin, and his wish to be easy in it, became an infidel. As I have often said, infidelity is far more a matter of the heart than of the head. I am persuaded that men think there is no God because they wish there were none. They find it hard to believe in God, and to go on in sin, so they try to get an easy conscience by denying His existence.

This young man was not only an infidel, but he was a very earnest one, and he used to distribute certain newspapers brought out by the infidel press. His employer was just as earnest a Christian as the young man was an infidel, and he used to constantly burn those papers whenever he could get hold of them, but the young man just as perseveringly procured others, and tried to lend them out among the apprentices and journeymen, that he might advance his own views. He was always a bold blasphemer, and a desperate sinner. He cared little what others thought of him, and he was, at least, honest in his iniquities.

One day, in a joke, he said to one of his companions, “I’ll tell you what I will do. I’ll show you that there is nothing in any of the Methodist cant and hypocrisy, the very first time there is a prayer meeting

at such and such a chapel, I'll go and offer myself to the minister to be prayed for by the members, and I shall get some fun out of them." He went, and with all the impudence and coolness possible, told the minister that he was a poor troubled soul, who wished to find peace, and that he would be very glad if the brethren would pray for him.

He did not know what he was doing, for whether it was that the very deed awoke his slumbering conscience, or whether the Spirit of God was pleased to show the sovereignty of His grace at that moment, I cannot tell, but as soon as one or two humble individuals had prayed for this young man, with tears in their eyes, he was down on his knees with tears in his own eyes, praying for himself.

Nay, not only did he pray then, but he never ceased to pray, and he is praying still, for he could not live without prayer. He found it no matter of fun, after all, he intended to tempt God, and to vex His people, but in that very act of sin he was arrested and converted. Do you think, then, if prayer only asked for in sport prevailed with God, that He will not hear your earnest cries for your own offspring! O Christians, be fervent in your supplications, for God will surely hear you, and your children shall be saved!

Another instance. There lived, in the village of Berwick St. John, in Wiltshire, a godly woman who had an ungodly husband. He not only hated good things, but he hated her for her goodness, for he turned her out of doors, on a Sabbath night, because she had gone to the meeting house. She, like a prudent woman, never told her neighbors, but walked the fields alone that she might not be noticed by others, and that her husband's shame might not be discovered.

She was sometimes driven to the greatest straits, and to a sadness which seemed as if it would bring her to a premature grave. She resolved to pray for her husband, one hour a day, for a year. She did so, and at the end of the year, he was as bad as before, if not worse. Then she thought she would try another six months, her faith was weak, and she was going to give her husband up then if her prayers were not heard. This was wrong, for we must not limit the Holy One of Israel.

But it so happened that, ere the six months were over, her husband came home once, in the middle of the day, looking dejected and downcast. Like a true and tender wife, she asked what was the matter with him, but he could not tell her. He went upstairs, he did not want his dinner, and he did not return to his work that afternoon, for God was at work with him. When his wife got him to speak, he said, "O wife, I can't pray!" "Do you want to pray?" she asked, and he replied, "Oh, I must pray! I do not know how it was, but about twelve o'clock today, such a strange feeling came over me. I feel that I am a lost man, for I cannot pray, will you pray for me?"

You may guess what her feelings were when asked by that obdurate wretch to pray for him. She did pray, then they prayed together, and their united prayers were answered. The next Sabbath they were both in God's house, and in a few more Sabbaths, they were side by side at the Lord's table. The godly woman's prayers were heard at last, and God again proved that He has not said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain."

Yet another instance. There was a captain, whose name I will not give in full just now, I will call him Mitchell, for that will suffice. This captain was a godly man, and he once went to sea, leaving his wife at home expecting soon to give birth to their firstborn child. While he was at sea, one day, a time of deep solemnity came over him, in the course of which he penned a prayer. This prayer was for his wife and for his yet unborn child. He put the prayer into the oak chest in which he kept his papers. He never came home again, for he died at sea.

His chest was brought home to his wife, she did not open it to look at his papers, but she thought they might be of use to her son when he grew up. That son lived, and at the age of sixteen, he joined a regiment at Boston. In that regiment, he became exceedingly debauched, profane, blasphemous, and sinful in every way.

At the age of fifty-four, while he was living in sin with a wicked woman, it struck him that he would like to look through the contents of the old chest which his father had left. He opened it, and at the bottom, found, tied up with red tape, a paper, on the outside of which was written, "The prayer of

Mitchell K_____ for his wife and child.” He opened it and read it, it was a most fervent plea with God that the man’s wife and child might belong to Christ, written fifty-four years back, and before that child was born. He shut it up, and put it where it was before, and said that he would not look into “that cursed old chest” again.

But that did not matter, for the prayer had got into his heart, and he could not lock his heart up in that chest. He became thoroughly miserable and the wretched woman, with whom he lived, asked him what was the matter with him. He told her what he had read in that paper, and she said she hoped he would not become a hypocrite. All the jokes and frivolities of his companions could not take out the dart which God had sent into his heart, and before long, by true repentance and by living faith, that man was in Christ a saved soul, married honorably to the woman with whom he had lived in sin, and walking in uprightness, serving his father’s God as the result of a prayer which had lain in an old chest for fifty-four years, but which God’s eye had seen all the while, and which, at last, He had answered when the set time had come.

Be of good courage, all you who are pleading for your children, for God will yet answer your supplications. As one of the old divines says, “Prayer is the rope which hangs down on earth, and there is a bell in heaven which it rings and which God hears.” Pull that rope again tonight, praying father and mother. Make the great bell in heaven ring again and again, and let its notes be, “Save my children, save my husband, save my wife, save my brother, let my sister live before Thee.” Your prayers shall be heard, and God shall yet grant your requests. The instances I have given you are authenticated, and I could give you more which have come under my own notice, but time fails and I have said enough upon that matter.

Let me just preach the Gospel at the close plainly and simply, and then I have done. The Gospel is this—Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, dead and buried, the third day He rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven. He came into the world to die for sinners, He hung upon the cross and bled for sinners. All that He died for will be saved, He died for sinners, and sinners will be saved. Your only question is, are you in the true Scriptural sense of the term a confessed and acknowledged sinner? If so, Jesus died for you.

On my doorstep the other night, when I reached home after preaching, stood a man. I asked him what he wanted, and he fell on his knees and cried, “I want to know what I must do to be saved.” I thought the man was mad to be there at that time of night on such an errand, but he cried out concerning his sin, told me I did not know his guilt, that he had been near committing suicide, and that he dared not go home to rest till he was told the way of salvation. “Well,” I said, “I will tell you,” but I could not make it plain to his poor darkened understanding until I told him a story which I have often told concerning an event which happened to me some time ago.

One evening when sitting to see inquirers, there came an Irishman upstairs. “Well, Pat,” I said. “How’s your riverence?” said he. “Don’t call me reverence,” I said, “because I am no reverence at all, but how is it you have not gone to your priest?” Said he, “I have come here to ask you a question, and if you can answer it, that will do.” “Well, what is the question?” “Why, you said last Sunday, that God would forgive sin, what I want to know is how that can be, for I have been such a great sinner that if He doesn’t punish me, He ought.”

Well, I thought I had got a sinner to deal with, and one who spoke from his heart what he felt. I said, “God pardons sinners for the sake of Jesus. But he replied, “I do not know what you mean.” I told him that Jesus Christ died, and that for the sake of that, God pardoned sinners. Still he could not comprehend, and he said, “I want to know how God can be just, He ought to punish sin, and yet He does not, how can that be?” “Well,” said I, “suppose you had been committing a murder, and the judge were to say you must be hanged.” “I should deserve it,” said he. “Well, how is Pat to be got off, and yet the sentence to be carried out?” “Faith!” says he, “that’s what I don’t exactly see.”

“Well,” I continued, “suppose I go to the Queen and say, ‘Please, your Majesty, I am very fond of this poor Irishman, I admit he ought to be hanged, but I want him to live, will you be so good as to have

me hanged instead?” “Well, she couldn’t say, ‘Yes,’ Pat, but suppose she did, and suppose I went to prison and were hanged instead of you, the murderer, would the Queen be unjust in letting you go afterwards?” “Faith!” says he, “I shouldn’t ask that, how could she meddle with me afterwards? because I should say a gentleman was hung for me, and sure enough I was free. But,” he added, “I don’t see what that has to do with the matter.”

“Why just this,” said I—“Jesus Christ loved sinners so much that rather than they should perish He was content to die Himself instead of them, and now, since Christ died for sinners, can you not see how God can be just in letting sinners go free?” “Oh, yes,” says he, “I see it now, but then how am I to know that Christ died for me, so that I cannot be punished? You say there are some people that Christ died for, so that God could not punish them, then how am I to know whether I belong to them?”

“Why, by this—are you a sinner? Because if you are—not in the matter of compliment, but if you are really so, and feel it, then Christ died in your stead, and you cannot die because God will never enforce the sentence twice, He will not ask payment first at the bleeding Surety’s hands and then at ours.” I think I see that man putting his hands together, and saying, “There! That’s Bible, I know that’s true, that must be true, no man could have made that up, that’s wonderful, I know it’s God’s Bible, for it just fits me, I am a poor sinner, and God has pardoned me.” And he went on his way rejoicing.

Now, doesn’t that fit you too? What would you give tonight if you could believe that Jesus Christ was punished instead of you, so that all your sins shall never be mentioned anymore, but all be forgiven because God punished Christ Jesus instead of you? I repeat, the only way you can tell is by answering this question—Are you a sinner? “Well, we are all sinners,” says one. No, no, you are all sinners, but you are not all the sort of sinners that I mean.

Some people say they are sinners, but they don’t mean it. They are like the beggars in London apparently full of sores. Many a man we see in the streets with his leg tied up, and seeming desperately lame, will take off the bandage when he gets to his lodging house, and will dance before he goes to bed at night. Another man standing against the wall says he is stone blind, but he will see to count his money when he gets home after begging all day. There are plenty of people of that sort.

Now, if I invited the lame and the blind, do you think I should receive those who were only shamming? No, I would only have those who were really lame and blind. So Christ died only for those who are real sinners.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

EPHESIANS 2

Verse 1. *And you hath he quickened,—*

Is it so? Can anyone lay his hand on your shoulder, and say right into your ear, “You hath he quickened”? If so, why this deadness of spirit? Why this worldliness? Why these wanderings? “You hath he quickened,”—

1-2. *Who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world,—*

You were dead to all that was good, but you were alive enough to that which was evil. It seems, from this passage, that dead men walk, yet not in the way of God, but “according to the course of this world,”—

2-3. *According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

We were not in the least better, by nature, than the very worst of men, and if we were any better in practice, it was only because we were restrained by providence and by grace from going into gross sin as

others did. Look unto the hole of the pit whence ye were digged, and see how humble was your origin. If you are proud of your fine feathers, as the peacock is, remember his black legs, see whence you came, and recollect the sin from which you were delivered. Bless God for your deliverance, and be humble as you think of the grace that has caused you to differ from others.

4-5. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*—

This is a wondrous truth, that God loves the sinner even while he is dead in sin. This love is not caused by any goodness in him, for he is dead, he is wrapped up in the cerements of his sins. There is nothing lovable about him, yet God, “for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”

6-8. *And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

That great truth was put in the fifth verse, in a parenthesis. Why did Paul write it twice? Because we cannot too often be reminded that we were saved by grace. It is a truth which we so soon forget that we had need to have it rung in our ears as by a peal of bells, “By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

9. *Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

God cannot endure boasting, and one great object of the plan of salvation by grace is to extinguish boasting, to shut it out. It is intolerable to God, He cannot endure it.

10. *For we are his workmanship,—*

If we have anything good in us, it was all made by Him.

10-12. *Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:*

That is a true description of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers, who were certainly heathen of the heathen, the wildest and most savage of men when Paul wrote this epistle, and yet, by sovereign grace, we have been brought to the very forefront of the nations of the earth, and we are no longer without God, nor yet without hope, nor yet without Christ, neither are we now strangers to the covenants of promise, nor aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

13-22. *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

Happy are the people who enjoy these high privileges.

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